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TAGS: PREL EAID XF NO KPAL

SUBJECT: FM STOERE WANTS A BIGGER ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) On March 16, FM Stoere went public with a complaint that the Quartet will not agree to an early date for a meeting (without the parties) of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) to discuss donor coordination. "It's a problem that we did not get this," Stoere told the widest selling Norwegian daily Dagbladet. "It would have been wise. Now we are losing valuable time."

¶2. (U) Stoere goes on to tell Dagbladet that he is launching a new (undefined) Middle East initiative with his Spanish colleague Miguel Angel Moratinos. "We are going to discuss what possibilities our two countries have in this situation. We cannot be passive about the situation if we have even a small chance for success." The paper also notes that Stoere has been elected as the leader of the Socialist International's Middle East Committee, and reports that Stoere plans to lead a Socialist International delegation to the region sometime in the coming months.

¶3. (U) In the course of the interview with Dagbladet, Stoere does make clear that Norway fully supports the central conditions that the international community has laid down for Hamas, including accepting Israel's right to exist, and renunciation of the use of violence. "It is impossible for Norway to economically support a government that has the annihilation of Israel as its explicit goal." However, Stoere told the paper "we have to avoid painting the Palestinian political milieu into a corner. We have to make it possible for the new Palestinian leadership to accept the previously agreed commitments that the peace process must be built upon."

¶4. (C) We spoke on March 16 to MFA office Director for Middle East Affairs Joern Gjelstad to seek clarification as to what Stoere hopes to accomplish with his Spanish colleague. Gjelstad had not seen the Dagbladet article, but said that to his knowledge Norway is not planning to launch any new policy initiative with Spain on the international stage. What Norway seeks is increased bilateral consultations with Spain on Middle East issues. When Spanish FM Moratinos visited Norway in summer 2005, one of the topics he discussed with his Norwegian hosts was increasing expert dialogues on matters of common interest. Gjelstad said that what is now under consideration is bilateral discussions of this nature, not a new international initiative towards the Middle East.

¶5. (C) Commenting on Stoere's statements about the AHLC, Gjelstad (strictly protect) said that the Norwegian Foreign Minister really is anxious for a political role in the Middle East. Stoere was disappointed that his overture to meet with the Quartet in London in January had been rejected, but still hopes that Norway (and other leading donor nations) will be included in the international political process through a "Quartet-Plus framework."

16. (C) Comment. FM Stoere just will not stay still and wants to be everywhere. Riding high in domestic opinion polls -- he recently came out as the most popular Norwegian minister ever/ever -- Stoere wants to be an international player. He does not seem to grasp that hyper-activism combined with scattershot and ill considered public diplomacy can get him into trouble with friends. Stoere probably needs to hear from Washington that too many unexpected antics (whether substantive or only media created) will call his credibility into question.

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